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The Father of Methodist Missions.

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COKE MEETING WITH BAXTER (page 11).

THOMAS COKE.

BRECON AND OXFORD.

Early in the eighteenth century there lived in the little town of Brecon, South Wales, a county doctor, Bartholomew Coke and his wife Anne.

Life passed very slowly in those days, and especially in that sequestered spot, yet it seemed busy enough to the quiet couple. Bartholomew was both doctor and chemist, according to the fashion of the times, and Anne had her many household duties, the superintendence of baking, cleaning and polishing, the stitching of long shirt seams and the gathering and hemming of her own voluminous gowns. Sometimes, perhaps as she sat in the soft, dim lamp-light she would pause and allow her eyes to wander over the well-kept treasures of her home, the shining glass and pewter, the framed prints and samplers, and her husband's books—grave medical works and herbals, and volumes of law, travel and philosophy. She rarely opened them, though no doubt it pleased her to dust them reverently. Bartholomew Coke was a man of culture and wide reading, but in those days education was not considered necessary for a woman, and Anne was quite content to be a simple loving housewife, ignorant of much that might have enriched and brightened her life, but sincerely happy in loving and caring for her husband.

Yet a shadow lay across the lives of these two. Anne could not forget the old chest where tiny garments had once been arranged with such love and joy and hope. Twice they had been taken out and used, but twice they had been laid away again with tears. Bartholomew, too, looked wistfully

at the county children as they played, remembering two little graves near by. He and his wife were quietly happy together, but they feared a childless old age.

It was on the ninth of October, 1747, that their prayers were answered. The coming of a little son lifted the shadow from his parents' hearts for ever, and all was joy and happiness in the quiet home at Brecon. The child was baptised Thomas and grew up to be a bright, lively boy, sufficiently fond of lessons to satisfy his father, but with no trace of unusual precocity.

It must have been in quiet, lovely little Brecon that he first learnt to love colour and beauty of form, a sense that never left him. Wherever he journeyed his eyes were open to the loveliness of the world. It has been said that the early Methodists were more conscious of the beauty of holiness than of the holiness of beauty—but that was never true of Thomas Coke.

In his sixteenth year he entered Jesus College, Oxford, as a gentleman commoner. Its dreaming beauty, its historic site and many other interests made a deep impression on his mind, but there were other and less beautiful things that left their mark upon him too. The public standard of morals was not a lofty one in the eighteenth century and Oxford was famous for all kinds of vice and excess. Coke played with temptation and, afraid of sneers, let himself be drawn into sin because others sinned. Thoughts of his father and mother, however, and their high hopes for him continually recurred to his mind, and at last he determined to be worthier of the two who loved him so unselfishly. He gave more time to study, and the books he read let in a flood of sunlight, so that the mist, that had gathered round his soul slowly cleared away.

When twenty years of age he took his bachelor's degree and left the University to return to Brecon. He was then a strikingly good looking man, though the description of one of his biographers brings a smile to our eyes to-day. "In outward appearance, though low in stature, he had . . . great gracefulness of form, features beautifully regular, dark eyes . . . a brow white as alabaster, and overhung with a mass of black

hair which descended in clusters over his shoulders." His time and thoughts for the three following years were devoted to work on the magisterial bench, and to reading for Holy Orders.

Brecon, Oxford, nature, theology, law and happy social life—all had their share in helping to make Coke the earnest, sympathetic, cultured evangelist he afterwards became.

A TRAVELLING PREACHER.

Thomas Coke was ordained a deacon of the Church of England in June, 1770, and his first curacy seems to have been Road, in Somerset, though later he was transferred to South Petherton in the same County. In 1772 he was ordained as a fully qualified clergyman, and while kneeling at the Bishop's feet he realised that all was not right between him and God. He did not know the peace of forgiveness, though with all mental sincerity he could say "I believe in the forgiveness of sins."

Among other books that helped to lead him into the light was Joseph Alleine's "Alarm to the Unconverted."* But Coke wanted more than books; with all his soul he longed for a friend. Just as he was struggling in the Slough of Despond, Thomas Maxfield came to his help. Previous to his ordination this man had been Methodism's first lay preacher and whilst visiting South Petherton he heard of its earnest young clergyman, and determined to seek him out. A very real friendship resulted and the more Coke learnt of the Saviour of the world the more eager he became to tell the glad news to his flock. He went to remote parts of the parish and preached in barns and cottages. It was while walking to one such little gathering that he prayed as never before that God would give him the realisation and the peace of sin forgiven. While he preached that realisation broke in upon him, and he tramped the long road home again with a heart that was singing with joy.

* A fact of special interest to us as Methodists, for our Covenant Service was adapted by John Wesley from the same little volume.

He was now inspired with a new message. Eager crowds soon filled the old parish church to overflowing and he erected a gallery in it at his own expense. He soon became very unpopular with the neighbouring clergy and it was not long before he was nicknamed "Methodist."

Methodism had then existed for forty years as a Society within the Church of England, but news travelled slowly, and not knowing much of the despised people he was supposed to resemble, Coke determined to find out all he could about them.

After meeting an old Devonshire Class leader and reading John Wesley's sermons and journals, he met that "great little man" at a friend's house in 1776. Wesley himself records this event. "Here I found a clergyman, Thomas Coke, late Gentleman Commoner of Jesus College, Oxford, who came twenty miles on purpose. I had much conversation with him and a union began which I trust shall never end."

The following year Coke was dismissed by his rector for preaching in unconsecrated buildings and was publicly rung out of his church. After much anxious thought he wrote to Wesley, who took the young man on tour with him, giving him opportunities of preaching, and explaining to him many of the customs of "the people called Methodists." Not long after, when thirty years of age, Coke threw in his lot with them and became a "travelling preacher," his name appearing for the first time in the *Minutes of Conference* dated 1778.

He now had a very much wider sphere than his curacy at South Petherton, and great crowds gathered to hear him in the Foundry* and in other London chapels as well as in the open air. He attracted both the educated and the poor and ignorant and many who came out of curiosity were won by his manly sincerity to a new and better life. He had no wish to confine himself to one congregation and in this he had Wesley's fullest sympathy. "Go out, brother, go out," counselled the old evangelist, "and preach the gospel to all the world."

* "The Foundry" was the first building opened as a Methodist Chapel and was situated in Moorfields, near City Road, London. It was in time superseded by Wesley's Chapel, City Road.

In common with all early Methodist preachers, Coke had his share of persecution. Once when standing to preach he was interrupted by a noisy mob headed by the vicar of the parish. Sticks and stones were soon flying at his head, but, not content with this, the vicar ordered out the fire engine, and Coke was compelled to retire wet through, with his gown torn to shreds.

In 1782, when thirty-five, he went to Dublin, and at Wesley's desire convened the Irish Conference. He became its President and with a few breaks continued in the office for the rest of his life, returning from whatever continent he might be in at the time to visit and father the Methodists there. During his flying visits to London he lived with his widowed mother until her death in 1783. In the old church at Brecon he placed a memorial "as a tribute of filial duty towards two of the best of parents," and years afterwards visited the church and lived over again the vanished days.

Through his many journeys up and down the country Coke became increasingly popular and he was so loved and trusted by the people that, had he been a weak man he must assuredly have been spoilt. He was by no means faultless but when his impetuous nature led him astray he was the first to apologise and publicly own his mistakes. His boundless ambition often caused him to be cruelly misunderstood by smaller minded men. His ambition was utterly impersonal, his heart free from mere self-advancement. Full of energy, nothing was too humble or too lofty to attempt for Christ. His whole thought was for the furtherance of Christ's kingdom and not for any personal power or prestige.

THE MISSIONARY ENTHUSIAST.

In 1776, after the War of Independence, the revolted British Colonies in North America declared themselves independent of British rule, calling themselves the United States of America. This involved great religious, as well as political, changes, for the Church of England naturally ceased to have any power of control over the Christian churches of the new

United States and all English clergymen came back to England. This left the numerous Methodist Societies in those parts in a very difficult position, for there were no ordained Methodist preachers in those days, except the few, who like the Wesleys and Thomas Coke, were also clergymen of the Church of England, and there were none of these in America. Up to that time, Methodists in the United States as in the British Isles, always went to the parish church to receive the Sacraments, which Wesley would not allow his unordained ministers to administer. Francis Asbury, who was in charge of our work in the United States, wrote to tell Wesley that our people, being no longer able to receive the Sacraments from the clergy, were insisting on laymen administering them. Wesley felt that this could not be allowed, and he therefore asked the Bishop of London to ordain certain chosen preachers for Methodists of America. The Bishop was unable to agree to this and Wesley was driven to what he himself felt to be a very desperate action. He "laid hands" upon Thomas Coke, appointing him to be "General Superintendent" (or Bishop) and sent him out to America to ordain Asbury and set him apart as a Bishop also, so that Asbury, in turn, could, when necessary, ordain suitable preachers, thus enabling them to administer the Sacraments to the Methodists of the United States.

Dr. Coke sailed with two other ministers on September 18th, 1784, but owing to contrary winds did not land at New York until November 3rd. Voyages in those days were long and dangerous, and storms and lack of wind frequently prolonged the time of discomfort.

Coke again became a travelling preacher, for Asbury had planned him a tour of a thousand miles and given him a horse and a black servant. After a memorable Conference at which Coke ordained Asbury a Bishop, the former was busy with preaching, drawing up and publishing rules for the Government of the "Methodist Episcopal Church,"* opening a college, and fighting the slave trade. Slavery abounded in his congregations,

* The name given to the Methodist Church in America.

and many good men were hotly opposed to the agitation for freedom. In Coke's diary of this time we read "The testimony I bore against slave holding provoked many to retire out of the barn and to combine to flog me as soon as I came out. A high headed lady* also told the rioters that she would give fifty pounds if they would 'give that little doctor a hundred lashes.' When I came out they surrounded me, but had only power to talk. Brother Martin is a justice of the peace and seized one of them, and Colonel Taylor was setting himself in a posture for fighting. But God restrained the rage of the multitude. Our Brother Martin has done gloriously for he has emancipated fifteen slaves."

Dr. Coke's diary is full of interesting records of services held in towns and forest stations.

"*Monday, Nov. 22nd.* I preached to a tolerable congregation in a forest. It is romantic to see so many horses fastened to the trees."

"*Sunday, December 5th, Cambridge.* In this town, which has been remarkable above any other on the continent for persecution, there arose a great dispute whether I should preach or not. The ladies in general were for it, but the gentlemen against it, and the gentlemen prevailed. Accordingly the church door was locked, though they have had no service in it I think for several years and it has been frequently left open, I am informed, for cows, dogs and pigs. However, I read prayers and preached at the door of a cottage to one of the largest congregations I have had in America."

In the early Spring he had a thrilling adventure while crossing the swollen waters of the Akatinke. He was on horseback, but without his black servant, Harry. The current was very strong and the water deep and icy cold. However, Coke and his horse plunged in only to find as they neared the opposite bank that a tree lay across the landing place. He says "In this dilemma I thought it best to lay hold on the

* A woman wearing a high coiffure, or high head-dress. This absurd fashion was greatly condemned by the early Methodists on both sides of the Atlantic.

tree and go over it, for I was afraid to turn the horse's head to the stream and afraid to go back. No sooner did I execute my purpose so far as to lay hold of the tree (and at that instant the horse was carried from under me) but the motion that I gave it loosened it, and down the stream it carried me."

Coke was swept along for some distance, and then a tiny island caught the tree to which he clung, but before he could climb up a large tree branch broke overhead and fell upon his back, nearly breaking it, and jamming him so tightly that he feared his strength would not hold out. The moments passed like hours as he prayed and struggled and prayed again. All his schemes for preaching the gospel ; all his ambitions for the service of God came up before his mind and he says " I could not consent to give them up."

At last, after a great struggle he got his knee on the tree he was grasping, pulled himself free, climbed up the little bank and waded to the shore. Shivering and wet through he walked a mile before coming in sight of a house ; but here an old negro lent him a ragged shirt and a suit, built a large fire and dried the wet clothing. Another man found the horse, and Thomas Coke lay down to sleep on a bed on the ground.

Soon after his return to England a change was noticed in his preaching. He tried to rouse men not only to a realisation of their own need of Christ, but to a sense of the needs of the whole world. He gloried in all he had been able to do in the United Kingdom and America, but always his heart was reaching out after those who lay in darkness.

Though he could not yet do all that he would, he did what lay nearest to his hand and after crossing to Guernsey and Ireland and strengthening the Societies there, he sailed with three other men to extend the work in North America. The voyage was a stormy one and the captain, being a superstitious man, soon decided that the ministers were the cause of the trouble. As the wind rose he grew beside himself with fear and anger and after seizing Coke's papers and throwing them overboard, he was just about to do the same with the doctor himself when common sense came to the rescue and he relieved his feelings by giving Jonah a good shaking. Later, as the

storm increased, the captain was obliged to make for the West Indies. Coke and his friends had meant to penetrate the remote parts of North America, but wonderful results came of this unexpected visit.

Landing at Antigua, December 25th, 1786, they found Methodists ready to welcome them. A former Speaker in the Antigua House of Assembly, having heard John Wesley preach in England had returned to preach the gospel to the English and to the Negro slaves of his own island. Later the work had been carried on by John Baxter, a Methodist local preacher and naval shipwright from Chatham. He had helped to erect at Antigua the first Wesleyan Chapel in the tropics, and it was on his way to conduct a service in it at five o'clock on the Christmas morning that he suddenly met the Missionaries. Thomas Coke preached that morning to "one of the cleanest audiences" that he had ever seen, "all the Negro women were dressed in white linen gowns, petticoats, handkerchiefs and caps, and the men just as neatly."

After visiting the other islands, preaching and establishing new churches, Coke crossed to America early in 1787 and returned to Ireland and England a few months later. Afterwards he went to the Channel Islands with Wesley, and on his return began a strenuous year of preaching up and down the towns and villages of England. Again he pleaded for the regions beyond and so enthusiastic was the response that before long he and four other missionaries were able to sail for the Barbados. Preaching places were secured and Societies formed there, and then Coke went on to St. Vincent and was soon full of a plan for entering a part of the island inhabited by the original Caribs. He was constantly scheming for the spread of the Gospel. Nothing daunted him. Trackless wastes, dangerous precipices, mountain paths were merely details to be expected. There was never a thought of self or of turning back. He reached this particular goal with Mr. Baxter, the man who had done such good work in Antigua. The chief received them kindly and the work succeeded so rapidly that Coke persuaded Baxter to spend two years in the island.

Then came another preaching tour through England and further appeals for missionary work. We can imagine what excitement Coke's visits would create and how the news of his coming would spread. Men had scarcely heard of Foreign Missions then, for though the Established Church had long since founded two Societies for this purpose, they held no important place in her life and were but feebly supported. Nonconformists also had done but little. The churches as a whole had been asleep to the claims of far-off lands. When William Carey asked that this duty of Christians should be discussed in an assembly of ministers, the President had replied "Sit down, young man, sit down! When God pleases to convert the heathen he will do it without your aid or mine." But ignorance and lethargy were passing away. The evangelical revival had brought with it a warming of heart and enlargement of vision. Methodism heard with fresh meaning the command of her risen Lord "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation."

MISSIONS AT HOME AND ABROAD.

The year 1790 was a memorable one in the history of our Church, for it saw the formation of the first Methodist Missionary Committee. This consisted of the aged Wesley, Thomas Coke, Adam Clark and seven other ministers. As the years passed various methods were used for raising the missionary income, and in 1793 Conference appointed a Committee "to advise and control" the expenditure.

By the middle of October, 1790, Coke embarked on his fourth voyage across the Atlantic, taking two ministers with him and leaving one of them at the Barbados. From there he went to St. Vincent and other West Indian Islands and found the white population in almost as great need as the Negroes, for the clergy were shockingly idle and relinquished a service upon the shallowest excuse. In spite of many successes, the missionaries had to contend with a great deal of prejudice and persecution, including the most incredible rumours about their moral character. Coke was said to have

been tried for horse-stealing and then to have escaped to America to get out of the way ! We smile at such improbable tales now-a-days, but in the eighteenth century scandalous stories were only too readily believed.

Next came a further visit to America, and Coke's diary is full of references to Conference business, woodland services, the beauty of nature, his various hosts, his successes and failures and his work among wandering Indian tribes. He not only preached to the heathen but aimed, always, at improving their mental and physical condition. He and Asbury built schools for their converts and did all that was possible to raise the people from degradation to self respect.

On his way to the Virginian Conference Coke speaks of the beauty of the woods he passed through. "The deep green of the pines, the bright, transparent green of the oaks and the fine white flowers of the dogwood, with other trees and shrubs make such a complication of beauties as are indescribable to those who have only lived in countries entirely cultivated."

Whenever a fresh route was taken through these American forests, the right track for the preachers was marked out by a row of split branches. These became known as the "preachers' marks," but we are not surprised to hear that "the wicked who had discovered the secret" would sometimes split branches in the wrong places and send the Methodist parson out of his way.

The news of Wesley's death, which had taken place on March 2nd, 1791, reached him on his arrival at Port Royal, and he felt compelled to return at once to England.

For years he had watched France and the Revolution, wondering when the chance would come to send the gospel into that distressed land, and after the fall of the Bastille he felt that the time was ripe for a tour of investigation. Accordingly he set off and secured a disused church for services, but this attempt proved a bitter disappointment. His first congregation numbered thirty-six and his second only six. He was then advised to return to England as certain people had

resolved that if he refused to do so they would hang him to a lamp post, so he left hoping for a better opening in the future.

By September 1st, 1792, and shortly before his forty-fifth birthday, he was once again crossing to America ; and in the following December he left New York for St. Eustatius in a most uncomfortably dirty ship, but he writes very cheerily and tells us that he was "able to become a contented Hottentot!" He found little at this island to encourage him. Persecution was rife and two women had been publicly flogged for attending a Methodist prayer meeting.

Coke's visits to America and Ireland were frequent and adventurous. In October, when on a voyage to the former country, on board *The President*, the boat was chased by a French cruiser. She had sighted them for several hours, altering her course directly she did so. She was flying the English flag, so that for a time the company on board *The President* were uncertain as to the stranger ship ; but as she gained upon them her build and general appearance made them very apprehensive. At last came the flash and the report, and as escape was impossibe, the captain obeyed the summons "to shorten sail and send her boat on board." The boat was sent and returned full of Frenchmen, who soon boarded the conquered vessel and took her as prize to the West Indies, though the enemy performed their disagreeable task as graciously as possible. The Frenchmen looked upon Coke as "a poor, harmless priest" and let him go free with little beyond his papers and the clothes he stood up in. He soon found friends to help him and then went on to the Virginian Conference. After six months' work in America he left for Ireland and later attended the Bristol Conference of 1798, where he was able to report an increase of over 2,000 converts for the year in the Mission lands.

The following summer, when again in Ireland, he met Gideon Ouseley, a man of good birth and education who had been converted under the preaching of the Methodists. Coke urged him to undertake a mission for the evangelisation of the Irish peasantry, preaching to them in their own language.

Ouseley consented, gave his life to this work, and, with another minister went into some of the most disturbed parts of the country and preached in the streets that not long before had been the scene of bloodshed. Among those who came under the influence of his preaching and personality was James Evans, the man who afterwards became the apostle to the Red Indians.* The men of the trackless forests and broad waterways of North America were in future days to be made glad because of the message delivered to their apostle by Gideon Ouseley.

Thomas Coke not only worked himself but had a wonderful power of wooing others to sacrificial service. Some people secure subscriptions for Foreign Missions who never succeed in the greater work of diffusing a holy enthusiasm for it, but when Coke spoke of the lands of darkness, men longed to send out the light. When he pleaded for men or for money, both were given gladly and eagerly.

Later we find him full of a scheme for sending Welsh speaking preachers into the rural parts of Wales. Two men were set apart for this work, which soon proved as successful as the Irish Mission.

In the Autumn of 1803 he embarked on his last voyage to America, and on arriving found that his colleague, Asbury, had mapped out a series of preaching tours amounting to about 2,000 miles. Coke seems to have taken all this as a matter of course, for in those days the Methodist ministers were "travelling preachers" indeed. Scorching sun, biting winds, fog and rain and snow all had to be faced in the saddle along roads which, at the best, were very rough, and at the worst mere tracks, only too easily obliterated by storm and flood.

SUNLIGHT AND SHADOW.

So far the history of Coke's life has been one long record of missionary voyages to and from Ireland, America and the West Indies, with numberless preaching tours in these countries and in England.

*See "James Evans," Pioneer Series, No. 1.

Early in 1805, when fifty-eight years of age, he met and loved a very charming woman, Penelope Goulding Smith. She had lived a quiet life in Bradford-on-Avon, reading a great deal, working sympathetically among the poor and collecting all kinds of beautiful curios for her little natural history museum. She was a gentle lovable woman, and it was no wonder that Thomas Coke sought her society. Her whole-hearted generous nature made a great appeal to the man who had himself sacrificed so much. They were married early in April and Penelope Coke left her quiet home for a new and busier life with the man she loved, ready to devote her time and her money to the furtherance of the Kingdom of God. The wife of a travelling preacher had a very lonely life, but the joy of helping him and sharing in his work made many a woman as absolutely happy then as it does to-day.

Three years after his marriage Coke published the first volume of his "History of the West Indies" and finished the third volume three years later. This work is divided into the natural, political and ecclesiastical history of the islands, and Dr. Etheridge says "the missionary details are almost the only relieving lights in a scene which ignorance, sensuality, oppression and suffering had overhung with monotonous gloom." Another useful book was his "Cottager's Bible," a small edition of the Bible with "reflections" at the ends of the chapters. In 1807 he published his Commentary in six volumes, the labour of nine years.

For several years Coke had tried to develop Home Missions, for he realised that many of his fellow countrymen were living in a darkness that seemed at times as great as any in the West Indies. It had always been his ambition to bring millions into the knowledge of Jesus Christ. He planned England into Mission districts, men volunteered, the work succeeded and large numbers were brought out of darkness into light.

After securing a Chaplain for the Methodist troops in Gibraltar, we find him busy planning to send preachers to the many French prisoners of war. The work was begun, and

from a letter he wrote a little later, we can tell how it developed. He wrote in June, 1811, "There are 60,000 French prisoners in England. Brother Toase is remarkably useful among many of them. Should he not be set at liberty to devote himself to their salvation? I could find a most excellent Frenchman to join him and could easily raise money enough for their support in a separate way, that is distinct from our fund. What a glorious thing it would be thus to send religion into France! It is our only way at present."

One wonders if Coke knew the meaning of such words as difficulty, discouragement, impossibility. If so he seems to have erased them from his vocabulary.

He had not lost sight of the claims of Africa, and the failure of a former plan only nerved him for a new adventure. In 1808 he sent an appeal to his brethren, putting the needs of the dark continent before them. For some time there was no response, but while he was in the West of England he met George Warren, a travelling preacher, who had long felt that he must give himself to Africa. Before very long he and three other young men offered for the work, and they arrived in Sierra Leone in November, 1811. Services and schools were commenced immediately, and the work continued to succeed and spread.

A few months before meeting Mr. Warren, Coke's life was suddenly darkened by the death of his wife, after only six years of married life. Although his energy was the same as ever, and his love for foreign missionary work increased more and more, his increasing weakness intensified the feeling of loneliness caused by his wife's death. A few months later he married Ann Loxdale. Her friends disapproved of the marriage on account of her delicate health, which they considered ill fitted for so unsettled a life, but Ann Loxdale had no room in her life for selfishness, and her joy was to help and care for her husband. The privilege was, however, only hers for a year. Soon after the first anniversary of her marriage she passed from this life and Coke was once more alone.

CEYLON AND THE CALL TO HIGHER SERVICE.

Thomas Coke's increasing loneliness led him to dedicate himself more than ever to Christ, and to the furthering of His Kingdom. The old man was bent and weary, yet in preaching, in the business of the church and in missionary work he was as keen and alert as ever. India was rarely absent from his heart or from his prayers and when this dream proved difficult of realisation, he discovered a chance of sending the gospel to Ceylon. Sir Alexander Johnson, a judge from that island, had visited England in 1809, and in conversation with his friend Wilberforce, had described the awful condition of the heathen there, as well as that of the nominal Christians. Wilberforce told the judge of the missionary work of the Methodists and urged him to ask them to open up work there. He, himself, put the matter before Dr. Adam Clark, who, in turn, brought it before the Conference of 1813.

Coke, who knew of these enquiries, felt that God himself was calling him to Ceylon. His friends did all they could to dissuade him from undertaking work in such a climate, but their protests were unavailing. "I am now dead to Europe and alive for India" he wrote to a friend. "God himself has said to me 'Go to Ceylon.' The fleets sail in October and January. If the Conference employs me to raise the money for the outset I shall not be able to sail before January. I shall bear my own expenses, of course."

Having heard that Portuguese was spoken in Ceylon, he immediately began to learn the language, before the consent of Conference and in spite of the discouragement of the previous London District Meeting. This was delightfully like him. He believed that God meant him to go, and he prepared accordingly.

Undaunted, he went to the Liverpool Conference of 1813, but the same opposition met him there. After the first discussion of the subject he went to his lodgings at night

weeping in the darkness and spent most of that night by his bedside, praying for India.

The next day he pleaded before the Conference with such force and passion that the difficulties seemed to grow less. "If the Conference cannot furnish the expense" added the grey haired, bent old soldier of the Cross, "I will be prepared to defray the expenditure necessary to the outfit and commencement of the work, to the extent of six thousand pounds. . . . . If you will not let me go you will break my heart."

It was impossible to deny such impassioned argument. For Ceylon Coke was willing to sacrifice himself and his all. Conference gave its consent, and gave him, too, six missionaries for Java, India and Ceylon and one for the Cape of Good Hope.

Once again love had won and Coke, overjoyed with his success, busied himself with preparing for the voyage and the work that lay beyond it. Feeling that his strength was failing, he thoughtfully drew up a plan for sustaining Foreign Missionary work at home by the formation of Branch Societies. He also made his will, leaving all his property to the fund for old and disabled ministers.

On the last Sunday before embarking he preached at Portsmouth to a crowded congregation, from the text "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God," and on the last day of 1813 he set sail with two missionaries in *The Cabalva*, and the rest in *The Lady Melville*. The Doctor became very popular among the passengers and the crew, for there was a charm about the man that few could resist. When the ship seemed likely to be lost through the fury of the gales he quieted the fears of the passengers. He would tramp the deck, cheerily recounting his own escapes and assuring the timid that the ship was well built and would weather the storm. Grey-haired, weather-beaten, and weary was this little old man, yet his calm courage was infectious. Everyone was helped and comforted by him. Everyone loved and trusted him.

His diary speaks of his "most charming study" in the stern of the ship, of the the other vessels sailing with *The Cabalva*, and of his quiet hours with the Portuguese Bible. "God himself has favoured me with these leisure hours" he wrote, "yet I cannot repent of the thousands of hours I have spent in at once the most vile, most glorious drudgery of begging from house to house. The tens of thousands of pounds which I have raised for the missions, and the beneficial effects thereof, form an ample compensation for all the time and all the labour. The whole was of God . . . I hasten to Asia with alacrity and joy and yet must confess that, if the clouds had been ever so obscure . . . . I should have been obliged to throw everything into the hands of my God, and to say to Him 'Here I am; send me to Asia!'"

The weeks and months passed and the voyage lengthened through April. Then as the ships neared the Equator, Dr. Coke's health began to cause grave anxiety. On the first of May he complained of chill and the next day Mrs. Harvard, a missionary's wife, found him sitting in his cabin in a very languid condition. Seeing her distress he roused himself and proposed a walk on deck, but his weakness became even more noticeable there. He went to the Harvard's cabin that night, and before leaving he prayed with them, and taking each solemnly by the hand he gave them his blessing. Mr. Clough, another missionary, saw him to bed and pleaded to be allowed to sit by him through the night, but Dr. Coke assured him there was no necessity for this,

Throughout the voyage he had been called at 5.30 a.m., for he liked to study during the cool, peaceful hours of the early morning, but on the following day there was no reponse to the attendant's knock, and fearing illness, the man lifted the latch gently and opened the door. Thomas Coke had passed on higher service. God had called His servant to Himself.

At five o'clock in the afternoon of the same day the ship's bell began solemnly tolling, the soldiers lined up on deck, and the passengers and crew gathered to pay their last

respects to the man who had won his way to so many hearts. There under the awning and in the sunset light, Mr. Harvard read the simple burial service, and the body of the man who so longed to preach the gospel in India and Ceylon was committed to the depths of the Indian Ocean, "God having provided some better thing concerning" him.

It is not difficult to picture the grief and dismay of the missionaries. They had lost not only a father and the tenderest of friends, but the leader of their great expedition. For a time grief almost overwhelmed them, but God abundantly answered their prayer for guidance, and one by one the difficulties were removed from their path. Old friends stood by them and new ones were raised up, so that no mission was ever begun under more favourable human conditions, and everything proved the wisdom of Coke's attempt to preach the gospel in Ceylon.

Every mission that he opened up is a memorial to his name, but surely the mission to Ceylon stands supreme. He died before he could preach upon its shores, but he had prayed and planned and toiled and sacrificed for it, and he had gathered together the band of men, who, filled with the spirit and devotion of their great leader, carried out his plans.

Such a man cannot die in the memory of the Methodist Church. He was the Father of Methodist Missions and will remain our great inspiration; the man whose devoted love broke down obstructions, who dared the impossible; the man in whose heart Christ's last command for ever rang—"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation."

For further reading:
"Wesley's World Parish," by Dr. G. G. Findlay.
W.M.M.S., 1/- post free.
"Life of Dr. Thomas Coke" by J. W. Etheridge, M.A.
(May be borrowed from Lending Library, postage 6d.)

CHRONOLOGY.

Thomas Coke born Oct. 9, 1747.
Entered Oxford 1763.
Ordained deacon 1770.
Ordained priest 1772.
Conversion 1776.
Meets Wesley 1776.
Dismissed from his church at South Petherton
Name appears on Minutes of Conference for 1778.
Works in London and tours with Wesley 1778-82.
Ordained a Bishop by Wesley and sent to America 1784.
Fights Slave trade 1785.
Storm-driven to West Indies 1786.
Embarks with John Wesley for Channel Islands 1787.
Embarks with three missionaries for Barbados 1788.
Preaching tour through England 1789.
Formation of first Methodist Missionary Committee 1790.
Death of Wesley, March 2nd, 1791.
Fifth voyage to America 1792.
Sixth voyage to America 1796.
Sails for Ireland and escapes French privateers 1797.
Formation of Irish Mission 1799.
Formation of Welsh Mission 1800.
Coke forms first Cornish Sunday School 1803.
Last and ninth voyage to America 1803.
Marries Penelope Goulding Smith 1805.
Mission to French prisoners of war 1811.
Wife's death 1811.
Coke pleads for Ceylon at the Liverpool Conference 1813.
Sets sail with six missionaries Dec. 31, 1813.
Ships near the Equator April 1814.
Coke called to higher service May 3, 1814.

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